

# Reflection Paper

Assignment # 3

January 14, 2014

Authored by: Sebastian Martinez

## Reflection Paper

---

### Assignment # 3

#### What I have learned

Before taking the HBL100 course, I had some limiting beliefs regarding the subject of Buddhism. I was convinced it was not to be considered a religion, but a strict philosophy or teaching. Dr. Lancaster's first few lessons on this subject have changed my mind. Because of the education and insight I have gained I now have a more in-depth answer to provide someone who wants to know, "Is Buddhism a religion?"

If Buddhism is looked at from a functionalist perspective it is evident that as an institution it serves society in a number of ways similar to other religions. Buddhism has characteristics which fit perfectly within the seven dimensions used to establish the concept of a religion. The seven dimensions are as follows: Practical and ritual, experiential and emotional, narrative and mythic, doctrinal and philosophical, ethical and legal, social and institutional, and lastly, material.

In addition, I now have a clear understanding of Emptiness. I know that when considering this teaching, we are not looking at some form of nothingness, some strange white-fog like sphere of reality. We are looking at form with true understanding. Nothing is with its own inherent personal identity. Many causes and conditions are responsible for what we perceive as form. For instance, using a lake as an example, we can see that the lake, which does exist for practical purposes, is impermanent, empty of its own individual identity. If we examine the lake correctly, we see that it is fed by five rivers which flow into it. The waters collect and form a basin of water, a lake. However, this lake is empty, always changing, and impermanent because its form is derived by causes and conditions outside of its own separate self. When the rivers change course or dry up, the lake also will change. Therefore, in considering emptiness, we must consider first, empty of what? Today, I understand that the lake is empty of a separate self, that all forms are empty of a separate self. I take this teaching into every aspect of my life. Because I understand that nothing exists on its own and that everything is connected I find it easier to cultivate compassion in my practice. I find peace in understanding emptiness, knowing that nothing exists on its own.

In the Heart of Understanding, provided in the reader, Thich Nhat Hanh spoke about a single piece of paper. He taught how even in a single piece of paper, if we look closely, we will see the interconnection to all phenomenon, all life within it. He described this as inter-being and I feel he is absolutely correct using this term to describe the interconnection all sentient beings share with one another. This applies to all forms

of physical phenomenon as well. I learned and experienced, in a profound way, an understanding of the Prajnaparamita Sutra. The five skandas or “heaps” of form, feeling, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness are always flowing into us, together dependent upon each other to create all experience. This is the true nature of life, this correct understanding. Today I have an understanding regarding life and my own experiences that is outside the ordinary person’s scope of thought. I am extremely grateful this was included in the course.

### Four Noble Truths

I also must make mention of the teaching on the Four Noble Truths; specifically, the truth of suffering. I learned that like all the noble truths, it contains three insights. The first insight is the truth of suffering or dukkha, secondly we see that dukkha should be understood, and thirdly the insight is that dukkha has been understood. It is here that I learned to truly understand dukkha. Suffering is a part of life, inseparable from the human condition, inseparable from the animal kingdom. But how I relate this to my practice with correct understanding is of primary concern. Today my experience is no longer “Oh poor me, I’m suffering so much,” but rather it is like this, “Oh there goes that suffering again, yes it’s the truth of suffering.”

The difference is that I no longer personalize suffering; I no longer entertain the suffering as my own, but instead look and experience it as a part of the human condition. In this way I don’t make more of it than necessary and it passes without affecting me much at all. I also found a relationship in my practice to the teaching of mind only. I realize that nothing exists outside of my own mental formations, all things exist only in my mind; therefore, by being mindful of what I mentally attach to, be they thoughts, feelings, or perceptions, they only exist as long as I entertain them in my mind. Being mindful of what I allow myself to think about helps me avoid getting stuck with negative thoughts. I’m much happier because I choose not to allow my mind to control me; rather I make the effort to control my mind. I found this teaching to be the most interesting and the most helpful to my practice.

In my further studies I would like to perfect and progress in my practice more than to intellectually learn any specific material. The Four Noble Truths in themselves provide enough material for me to study throughout my life. I was told by someone much more advanced than me, that if I could understand dependent origination and the Four Noble Truths that I could reach enlightenment. So, with this in mind I plan on practicing for a long, long time. With what I have learned thus far, I have really only truly learned that I have a lot more to learn.